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“Death is not the end, but the passage towards full light”

In his 10 December general audience, Pope Leo XIV continued his catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, speaking about the Resurrection as the final answer to the question of death.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning! Welcome to you all!

The mystery of death has always raised profound questions in human beings. Indeed, it seems to be the most natural and at the same time most unnatural event that exists. It is natural, because every living being on earth dies. It is unnatural, because the desire for life and eternity that we all feel for ourselves and for the people we love makes us see death as a sentence, as a “contradiction.”

Many ancient peoples developed rites and customs linked to the cult of the dead, to accompany and to recall those who journeyed towards the supreme mystery. Today, however, we see a different trend. Death seems to be a sort of taboo, an event to keep at a distance; something to be spoken of in hushed tones, to avoid disturbing our sensibilities and our tranquillity. This is often why we avoid visiting cemeteries, where

those who have gone before us rest as they await resurrection.

So what is death? Is it truly the last word on our lives? Only human beings ask themselves this question, because only they know they must die. But being aware of this does not save them from death; on the contrary, in a certain sense it “burdens” them compared to other living creatures. Animals suffer, of course, and they realize that death is near, but they do not know that death is part of their destiny. They do not question the meaning, purpose and outcome of life.

Considering this aspect, one might then think that we are paradoxical, unhappy creatures, not only because we die, but also because we are certain that this event will happen, even though we do not know how or when. We find ourselves aware and at the same time powerless. This is

probably where the frequent repressions and existential flights from the question of death originate.

Saint Alphonsus Maria de' Liguori, in his famous work *Apparecchio alla morte* (Preparation for Death), reflects on the pedagogical value of death, emphasizing that it can be a great teacher of life. To know that it exists, and above all to reflect on it, teaches us to choose what we really want to make of our existence.

Praying, in order to understand what is beneficial in view of the kingdom of heaven, and letting go of the superfluous that instead binds us to ephemeral things, is the secret to living authentically, in the awareness that our passage on earth prepares us for eternity.

Yet many current anthropological views promise immanent immortality, theorize the prolongation of earthly life through

technology. This is the transhuman scenario, which is making its way into the horizon of the challenges of our time. Could death really be defeated by science? But then, could science itself guarantee us that a life without death is also a happy life?

The event of the Resurrection of Christ reveals to us that death is not opposed to life, but rather is a constitutive part of it, as the passage to eternal life. The Pasch of Jesus gives us a foretaste, in this time still full of suffering and trials, of the fullness of what will happen after death.

The Evangelist Luke seems to grasp this harbinger of light in the dark when, at the end of that afternoon when darkness had shrouded Calvary, he writes: “It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning” (*Lk* 23:54). This light, which anticipates Easter morning,

already shines in the darkness of the sky, which still appears overcast and mute. The lights of the Sabbath, for the first and only time, herald the dawn of the *day after the Sabbath*: the new light of the Resurrection. Only this event is capable of illuminating the mystery of death to its full extent. In this light, and only in this, what our heart desires and hopes becomes true: that death is not the end, but the passage towards full light, towards a happy eternity.

The Risen One has gone before us in the great trial of death, emerging victorious thanks to the power of divine Love. Thus, he has prepared for us the place of eternal rest, the home where we are awaited; he has given us the fullness of life in which there are no longer any shadows and contradictions.

Thanks to Him, who died and rose again for love, with Saint Francis we

can call death our “sister.” Awaiting it with the sure hope of the Resurrection preserves us from the fear of disappearing forever and prepares us for the joy of life without end.

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